

BRIEF19

A daily review of covid-19 research and policy.

POLICY BRIEFING

Congress to take up coronavirus relief package in “lame duck” session.

Now that the Americans have cast their votes in the presidential election, will there be a greater appetite for a bipartisan coronavirus relief package? Earlier in the pandemic, the CARES Act passed through United States Congress, but as the national emergency has extended into the fall, no new bills have been seriously considered with the election looming.

Now, with record-breaking days this week in which new coronavirus cases in the United States topped more than 100,000 per day for the first time, and with hospitalizations on the rise placing greater strains on the healthcare system, it is evident that new legislative action will be needed. The partisan tensions that have precluded progress in recent months must now be cast aside.

While Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell had previously said that coronavirus relief would not likely happen until the new year, he has recently changed his tone, saying he hopes that a new bill can be passed by the end of this year during Congress’s lame duck session, calling it “job one” along with funding the government funded past the December 11th deadline.

The stock market gains heading into Election Day reflected the optimism that the election would resolve Congress’s stalemate over coronavirus relief. Indeed, while it appears as though Republicans may retain control of the Senate, with two Senate races apparently headed to runoffs, the uncertainty over the final coalition may give Congress added incentive to act sooner rather than later. With the Senate returning from recess on Monday, November 9th, we will see soon to what extent good faith negotiations are on the horizon and what the lawmaker’s priorities will be. [6 November 2020](#).
—Miranda Yaver, PhD

Doctors respond to baseless accusations on covid-19 billing.

President Trump has once again made headlines with a controversial statement at a rally. After initially [suggesting](#) at an October 25th rally that physicians get paid more by reporting a patient’s death as covid-19 related, the president [doubled](#) down just five days later, stating that, “doctors are very smart people, so what they do is they say everybody dies of covid... it’s like \$2000 more, so you get more money.” Susan Bailey, the president of the American Medical Association [called](#) these remarks, “malicious, outrageous, and completely misguided.” The American College of Emergency Physicians [released](#) a statement saying, “to imply that emergency physicians would inflate the number of deaths from this pandemic to gain financially is offensive, especially as many are actually under unprecedented financial strain as they continue to bear the brunt of Covid-19.”

The fundamental discrepancy comes down to this: in many cases it is the exacerbation of an underlying comorbidity that actually leads to a patient’s death (e.g. congestive heart failure, emphysema, *etc*), but when the presence of covid-19 leads to a patient’s inability to compensate for a condition that they would have otherwise been able to recover from, then covid-19 is indeed the primary factor contributing to death. *Various*. [4 November 2020](#).

—Joshua Lesko, MD

Herd immunity still over the horizon.

With the US hitting near-daily records for new coronavirus cases, the prospect of herd immunity has taken on fresh life. But in a recent [vlog](#), CEO of the American Medical Association, James Madara stated that any such protections remain a long way off. According to estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 9%, or roughly thirty million Americans have been infected and are immune. Per Dr. Madara, herd protection would require at least seventy percent, or two hundred and thirty million people to have immunity to achieve this goal. He argues that vaccines are one way to help reach this goal, but even this is not so simple. The Food and Drug Administration and CDC have set a fifty percent efficacy standard for coronavirus vaccines, meaning that nearly every American will need to be inoculated to achieve the coverage required. With lingering vaccine hesitancy, this may prove to be an elusive goal. *The American Medical Association*. [2 November 2020](#).

—Joshua Lesko, MD

Trump hints at firing Fauci. At a late night rally in Florida, President Trump suggested to the assembled crowd that he was considering [removing](#) Dr. Anthony Fauci, one of the nation’s leading infectious diseases experts and member of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, from his position as the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease at the National Institutes of Health. The suggestion from the President came following chants from the audience to “Fire Fauci.” Fauci has become more vocal regarding the mismanagement of the covid-19 pandemic in the United States despite the assertion from the Trump administration and Trump himself that covid-19 is under control and that the nation is “rounding the turn” of the pandemic.

It is worth noting that President Trump himself could not directly fire Dr. Fauci, who is a career civil servant, but could task the action to a political appointee if he so desired. Former Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. addressed President Trump’s comment at a rally on Monday afternoon, stating “If you think they've done a bad job at managing Covid so far, basically what they’re telling you now is you ain’t seen nothing yet.” On Friday, the US posted an all-time high number of new infections at roughly 99,000 cases. [3 November 2020](#).

—Jordan M. Warchol, MD, MPH

Kimi Chernoby, MD, JD, Policy Section Editor.

Kane Elfman PhD, Publishing and design.

Anna Fang, Week in Review.

Jeremy Samuel Faust MD MS, Editor-in-Chief.

<http://www.brief19.com/>

Twitter: [@brief_19](#)

submissions@brief19.com

Brief19 is a daily executive summary of covid-19-related medical research, news, and public policy. It was founded and created by frontline emergency medicine physicians with expertise in medical research critique, health policy, and public policy.